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SCIENCE

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1912

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THE ALLEGHENY OBSERVATORY IN ITS RELATION TO ASTRONOMY¹

WHEN I last visited the Allegheny Observatory, in 1869, I found very different conditions from those that prevail to-day. As a boy, I had learned that Pittsburgh was at the junction of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers, and I was glad to verify it by actual inspection from the door of the observatory. To-day these rivers are not in sight. The little thirteen-inch telescope appears to have attained dimensions and to have acquired appliances beyond our dreams in those days. In one respect is the observatory unchanged. I find a young and enthusiastic director, full of new ideas and, I hope, aiming to make this observatory the greatest in the world. My good friend Langley was then thirty-four years old. His work on the sun, continued through his life, was in its infancy. He tried to persuade us that the smoke hanging over Pittsburgh was especially advantageous for his line of work, since it cut off the irregularities due to the heat of the sun when the sky is clear. Within limits, this is true.

The early history of the Allegheny Observatory is unique, and in some respects stormy. The first director became obsessed with the idea that the telescope must be preserved, but not used. This view he maintained with the aid of a shotgun. He became insane, and wrote a poem. Far be it from me to suggest any connection between these two facts. In this poem, he predicted that the object glass of the telescope would be stolen. Strangely enough,

¹ An address delivered at the dedication of the new Allegheny Observatory, August 28, 1912.